

COMMENT SHEET

US 321 Improvements

Corridor Public Hearing

R-2237C

Project 6.739001T

Caldwell and Watauga Counties

August 26, 2002

NAME:

ADDRESS:

COMMENTS AND/OR QUESTIONS:

THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR ALL OF YOUR INCREDIBLY DIFFICULT WORK ON THIS HIGHLY EMOTIONAL ISSUE. I DO NOT LIVE IN THIS PART OF WATAUGA COUNTY, BUT HAVE LIVED IN WATAUGA CO FOR 25 YEARS NOW AND THESE MTHS. ARE DEAR TO MY HEART I AM SO FORTUNATE + BLESSED TO BE ABLE TO RAISE MY CHILDREN HERE. I FEEL VERY STRONGLY THAT THE WIDENING ALTERNATIVE IS THE ONLY CHOICE TO MAKE. AFTERALL, IT WILL CERTAINLY IMPROVE THE LOOKS + "FEELING" OF THE HISTORIC GREENPARK - AND THE CHARACTER E.

← WITH THE BEAUTIFUL MEDIANS + PLANTINGS

Comments may be mailed to:

C. B. Goode, Jr., P. E.

Manager of the Office of Human Environment
1583 Mail Service CenterRaleigh, NC 27699-1599 Phone: (919) 250-4092 Fax: (919) 250-4208
E-mail: cgoode@dot.state.nc.us

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Caldwell and Watauga Counties

August 26, 2002

NAME:

ADDRESS:

1759 AHO RD Boone NC 28607

COMMENTS AND/OR QUESTIONS:

widen 321 thru Blowing Rock where the existing Road is. I am totally against any I am 34 years here in AHO all my life. It is absurd to put the road any where else. Listen to the Local people and not the in plants. Apply common sense - Lower cost Minimize change

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NAME: _____

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COMMENTS AND/OR QUESTIONS:

B-260 Put Road where existing
Road is and leave it
there. Leave Bypass where
it is at.

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Take a look @ Hwy 18 in Lenoir
to 421 & same mts.

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I am here to speak in opposition to the proposed widening of the existing 321 road way through Blowing Rock. There are many reasons for this but I would like to mention just two. First: 321 serving Blowing Rock is very unusual because the road provides a primary access for vehicles with a Blowing Rock destination. Also the road serves as a major through road for vehicles heading for Boone, the rest of Watauga County and to neighboring counties and states. Also and very importantly this road serves as a local service road providing the **only access** to many commercial establishments. The **only** grocery store and service station and **only** ABC store, retail stores, popular restaurants, hotels and motels, professional offices, two convenience marts, and a regionally popular outlet mall. This widening project is unwise because it would mix the local service traffic with through traffic. This situation is only going to get worse, as traffic increases. Trying to provide a sufficient roadway for through traffic on a road that already is a busy local services road is inviting serious conflicts. A driver trying to get from one of the commercial establishments into the flow of through traffic will become a much more serious problem in the future. **The time is now for a true Blowing Rock bypass.** Separate the through traffic from the local service and Blowing Rock destination traffic. Our neighboring community, the Town of Boone is right now undergoing an agonizing, conflict-ridden process of trying to deal with something called the Daniel Boone Parkway. They are struggling with how to deal with traffic with a Boone destination and also through traffic. **Blowing Rock needs a real bypass and let's truly plan that now.** Throughout North Carolina major road projects avoid existing commercial service roads or target destination areas like Blowing Rock. They go near them but do not cut through the middle of them. **A true Blowing Rock bypass is needed.**

My second reason for opposing the existing 321 widening is that the through traffic will continue to grow as our area beyond Blowing Rock will be increasingly popular. **No matter what we do now**, a true Blowing Rock bypass will be needed in the future, 10 to 20 years away. **Plan that bypass now.** Put the true bypass below the crest of the mountain outside of the Town limits. Why destroy the existing businesses along 321 during the construction process? Just try tracking the lawsuits of existing businesses in Boone which suffered greatly during the relatively short distance, 105 extension project. **Over budget and too long a time is the rule**, not the exception of highway projects in mountainous areas. We can look to the 421 project to Boone, the previous 321 project on the relatively flat area north of Happy Valley in Caldwell County. If we will need a true Blowing Rock bypass eventually, no matter what we do now, **let's do that first.** It is a wise use of our time our energies and our money. A true Blowing Rock bypass is wise, it follows the majority of the major road projects in North Carolina by avoiding existing commercial corridors, and will help preserve the attractive Town of Blowing Rock as a destination place. **Bypass the Town with through traffic and let's start now.**

Thank you for your attention.

Blowing Rock that center will be irrelevant for the season during which Blowing Rock is

the people of Blowing Rock of their right to determine the destiny of this town.

I do not pretend to represent all of Blowing Rock, but I think I speak for between 75.36% and 64.25% of the residents of the area....these are the people who said loud and clear in their survey questionnaires that they **OPPOSED** widening of US321. I can only imagine how much higher the percentage would be if that survey were taken today. With time and the inconvenience of road construction in the area, our citizens are realizing that if Blowing Rock is taken to its knees by this multilaning in our town, it most likely will never recover. How much is Blowing Rock worth...I know others will address that, but think to yourselves how much you value this very special place to live....where else are you going to find what we have here and value so greatly?

So many visitors to our little Blowing Rock Museum applaud the efforts of the town officials and the citizenry for working hard to maintain the treasure that we have. We can not, no **WILL NOT** allow NCDOT and people that do not live here to tell us how to run our town.

As I drove up from Hickory yesterday afternoon, in a line of about 20 cars, it took me a full 16 minutes to go the 13 miles from Patterson to the Green Park Inn, and I still had to contend with cars with ASU stickers speeding in and out of the passing lanes....because I was curious, I followed the line of traffic to the Sunset stop light...only one car of the possible fleet of 20+ turned off to go to Main Street, the others whipped on through, as fast as they could go on the 35 mph strip. We are a "pass-through" for Lenoir to Boone (and further) truck transportation, and we are not going to let this happen on a grander and wider scale at higher speeds.

The numbers of houses and businesses disturbed by this route are as phony as the video and other enhanced pictures of taking land in front of the Green Park Inn for all that decorative median strip and fancy landscaping. This is a super con-game on the part of NCDOT and we are not accepting that any more than we are the fact that "taking" a house or land in DOT language is actually destroying it....would you not feel your house/land had been "taken" if the road came within three feet of your front door...your life style certainly would change, and no one would care, because these people do not live here, and they are using our money to take us on a long ride to the bottom of the world as we know it. Are you willing to accept this kind of treatment...I am not, and I know there are others, who intend to fight this battle to the end to save Blowing Rock as we know it today.

Do we need to ask once again: Why is Blowing Rock the only town along US Highway 321 Bypass that you do not plan to bypass? Cost is not a good enough reason to destroy people's homes, businesses, quality of life and the very soul of the town. Think about this, once the quality of life in our town is reversed, it can never be regained. NCDOT, is there not even a tiny pang of guilt for the devastation you are planning for Blowing Rock????

North Carolina Board of Transportation
1583 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, NC 27699

August 29, 2002

Board Members:

After several years of debate concerning the widening of Hwy 321, there is little left to say about the merits of widening the existing road as opposed to any alternative. By any objective measure, the recently released EIS confirms that widening the existing road is best for all concerned parties, including Blowing Rock. Therefore, the purpose of this letter is not to rehash the same arguments. We realize that public decisions are not always based on the merits of a particular position, but often based on the tactics and maneuverings of special interest groups. Consequently, the purpose of this letter is to point out that the opposition to DOT's plans to widen 321 has been purposely exaggerated.

Concerned Citizens of Blowing Rock has skillfully utilized clever tactics and marketing principles in order to make public opposition to the project appear more formidable than it really is. They have inflated their ranks by insinuating various horrors that are blatantly untrue. For example, a rumor frequently brought up is that when the widening construction begins, traffic will be diverted onto Main Street. Even though DOT denies such a plan, the rumor remains.

In interviews with large regional newspapers, Concerned Citizens representatives often do not make a distinction between Main Street (321) and 321 Bypass. This "oversight" and statements using the phrase "through the middle of town" purposely insinuate that Main Street itself will be widened. This is obviously an alarm tactic designed to draw sympathy from residents across the state who are not familiar enough with the area to distinguish between 321 and 321 Bypass.

Inhabitants of resort areas are notorious for having a gated-community attitude, characterized by a narrow perspective, pettiness, and selfishness. Those with this mentality try to create their own little world and shield it from the influence of those not privileged enough to share it. Rather than compromise and try to mitigate any potential negative influence, they demand that everyone bow to their desires, no matter how preposterous. The notion that millions of North Carolina (& United States) taxpayers should foot the enormous bill for an alternate route in order to appease a handful of privileged resort residents is ludicrous. This is not to say that everyone in Blowing Rock has such an attitude, indeed many town citizens- especially the merchants- support DOT's original plans. But they have been drowned out and, we suspect, bullied into silence by the overwhelming propaganda of the town's self-appointed spokesmen.

No one argues against the desire to maintain Blowing Rock's character. In too many situations, road-building decisions have taken precedent over every other issue, to the detriment of communities across the nation. But it should be obvious to anyone with even passing knowledge of Hwy 321 that the issue is not about preserving Blowing Rock's character. The recently-named historic district is only marginally significant, which should

be obvious from the fact that it was not considered important until widening was proposed. Much of the existing route is through an area characterized mostly by vacant lots and chain retail businesses. Indeed, the widening of the road with the proposed enhancements will actually improve the area and add to the character of the town.

Concerned Citizens, in response to opposition from the Aho, Blackberry, and Green Hill communities, has tried to characterize us as "neighborhood groups" with a NIMBY attitude. The irony is that Concerned Citizens itself has exhibited the most blatant NIMBY attitude possible. They have been emphatic that the only acceptable alternate routes are those that completely bypass Blowing Rock. They accuse DOT of having no concern for local communities when making road decisions, while being guilty of the same attitude in trying to route a bypass through any community except Blowing Rock. They have shown no concern for the amount of tax dollars needed for such routes, and are even willing to risk the Blue Ridge Parkway-a resource of national significance- as long as their backyard remains untouched. In short, our opposition to any alternate route can hardly be characterized as looking out for our own interests, in light of the extremely narrow, selfish mindset of Concerned Citizens.

We're confident that DOT is familiar with the dynamics of controversial public issues, and that you are able to see the reality behind the false images presented by Concerned Citizens. Opposition groups often have the upper hand because they are able to appeal to people's emotions (a citizen's group fighting big government, etc.). While the general public would agree that widening 321 is to be preferred over an alternate route, being for a road-widening project is not something that most people get passionate about. The public is generally complacent on most issues, trusting that the right decisions will be made for the right reasons. With this particular issue, few individuals and groups have expressed concern about an alternate route primarily because most people are sure that DOT will choose to widen the road rather than reroute it. The proposed alternatives are so expensive, so environmentally damaging, and so absurd- especially when compared to widening the existing road- that the inhabitants of the world outside Blowing Rock are unable to fathom the thought that DOT would even seriously consider the alternatives.

Like many resort communities, Blowing Rock has a significant population with the time, wealth, education, and experience to organize and orchestrate a campaign on any issue they perceive to be important to them. The surrounding rural communities are not as fortunate, being populated with working-class people who do not have the means nor the leisure to become intensely involved in public issues, real or perceived. You must ensure that your decision is based on reality; not on a scenario created, exaggerated, and promoted by a group with very narrow interests. As government leaders and decision-makers, you have responsibility to all citizens, not just those with resources to demand your attention.

(Please note that no attempt was made to widely circulate this letter in order to get as many signatures as possible. As stated above, this issue is not about which group can generate the most noise. It is about doing what is best for the state and the nation.)

I was appalled at the attacks and the rudeness displayed at the meeting on 8/26/02 at the Blowing Rock Assembly Grounds. Please know that those engaged in such tactics are in the minority and do not represent the majority.

B-262

North Carolina Board of Transportation
1583 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, NC 27699

RECEIVED
SEP 03 2002

August 28, 2002

Board Members:

After several years of debate concerning the widening of Hwy 321, there is little left to say about the merits of widening the existing road as opposed to any alternative. By any objective measure, the recently released EIS confirms that widening the existing road is best for all concerned parties, including Blowing Rock. Therefore, the purpose of this letter is not to rehash the same arguments. We realize that public decisions are not always based on the merits of a particular position, but often based on the tactics and maneuverings of special interest groups. Consequently, the purpose of this letter is to point out that the opposition to DOT's plans to widen 321 has been purposely exaggerated.

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I travel 321 every day to my business in Senoir and am looking forward to the day when I can feel safer driving on a 4-lane highway - especially in the winter.